

About the Urban Aboriginal Peoples Study

Under the auspices of the Environics Institute, the *Urban Aboriginal Peoples Study (UAPS)* is an innovative research study aimed at advancing the national conversation with and among Aboriginal Canadians. The study seeks to better understand and document the values, experiences, aspirations and identities of Aboriginal people living in Canadian cities today.

This study is about the future, not the past. The *UAPS* seeks to advance – and reframe – the national conversation between and among Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples. It also seeks to build capacity so that this study can be replicated by Aboriginal organizations in other communities.

The *UAPS* sprang from discussions that began in 2008 that identified the need for a well-designed empirical research study that would work with diverse Aboriginal peoples to understand and reflect on evolving urban Aboriginal perspectives. The Institute embarked on this project not as a pollster, but as a partner and collaborator with a range of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal individuals who have been integral to the success of this project.

First, the design and interpretation of the *UAPS* has been guided by an Advisory Circle of recognized experts from academia and from Aboriginal communities (see below for a list of *UAPS* Advisory Circle members). The Advisory Circle's ongoing involvement in *UAPS* has been instrumental and, with their help, a study was designed that is intended to be inclusive of all urban Aboriginal peoples.

Second, the *UAPS* Steering Committee has devoted considerable time, energy and expertise to the successful management and execution of the study. Michael Mendelson (The Caledon Institute), David Eaves (Independent), May Wong (Environics Institute), Amy Langstaff (Environics Institute), Doug Norris

The UAPS Advisory Circle

Allan Benoit	Métis Nation
John Berry	Queen's University
Ellen Bielawski	University of Alberta
Lewis Cardinal	Cardinal Strategic Communications
Hayden King	McMaster University
Peter Dinsdale	National Association of Friendship Centres
Calvin Helin	Lawyer, author of <i>Dances with Dependency</i>
Corinne Jetté	President and CEO, Mount Pleasant Educational Services Inc.
Caroline Krause	Former principal Grandview Elementary School, Faculty of Educ., UBC
Peter Menzies	Centre for Addiction Mental Health
Katherine Minich	University of Toronto
David Newhouse	Trent University
Andrew Parkin	Canadian Millennium Scholarship Foundation
John G. Paul	Atlantic Policy Congress of First Nations Chiefs
Evelyn Peters	University of Saskatchewan
Mark Podlasly	N'laka'pmx First Nation / Harvard/Queens (fellow)
Jennifer Rattray	Peepeekisis First Nation / University of Winnipeg
John Richards	Simon Fraser University
Pamela Sparklingeyes	Aboriginal Learning Services, Edmonton Catholic School Board
Noella Steinhauer	National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation

(Environics Analytics), Michael Adams (Environics Institute), Keith Neuman (Environics Research Group), Sonya Kunkel (Environics Research Group), Sarah Robertson (Environics Research Group), Jay Kaufman (KTA) and Karen Beitel (KTA) have all played an important role in bringing this study to fruition.

Third, the *UAPS* would not have been possible without the efforts and commitment of Ginger Gosnell-Myers (Project Manager) and Vina Wolf (Associate Project Manager). They, along with city supervisors Dr. Jino Distasio, Allan Vicaire, Chris Atchison, Christine Cybenko, Douglas Sinclair, Jaimee Marks, Dr. Maisie Cardinal, Nathan Elliot, Dr. Rachel Eni, Shelley Knott, Dr. Trudy Sable and Tungasuvvingat Inuit (Martin Lougheed and Barbara Sevigny), and all of the interviewers in each of the 11 participating cities, ensured that the research was conducted in a comprehensive and sensitive way, with meaningful Aboriginal involvement. Their passion and perseverance in collecting the stories of urban Aboriginal peoples across Canada, along with their belief in the *UAPS*, has been integral to the success of this study.

Fourth, the *UAPS* has relied on a high degree of involvement and co-operation among city officials, local colleges/universities, Aboriginal organizations and governing bodies, and community foundations. Their ongoing commitment to the *UAPS* research process has been important to bringing this study to fruition.

Finally, the *UAPS* would not have been possible without the unconditional support and sponsorship of its sponsors.

UAPS Sponsors

Calgary Foundation
Canadian Millennium Scholarship Foundation
City of Edmonton
City of Toronto
Edmonton Community Foundation
Edmonton United Way
Elections Canada
Environics Institute
Government of Canada (Federal Interlocutor)
Halifax Regional Municipality
Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami
John Lefebvre
Mental Health Commission of Canada
Province of Alberta
Province of Manitoba/Manitoba Hydro
Province of Nova Scotia (Aboriginal Affairs)
Province of Ontario (Aboriginal Affairs)
Province of Saskatchewan
Tides Canada Foundation
Toronto Community Foundation
Trillium Foundation
Vancouver Foundation
Winnipeg Foundation

Background of this report

The Urban Aboriginal Peoples Study: Main Report is the culmination of a research process started more than two years ago, in March 2008, by the Environics Institute. The original inspiration for the *UAPS* stemmed from observations heard repeatedly from Aboriginal persons and organizations about the need for research that aims to understand the experiences, identities, values and aspirations of urban Aboriginal peoples across Canada, and how valuable they felt it could be in revealing and documenting what is happening in Aboriginal communities in ways that could lead to positive outcomes.

According to the most recent Statistics Canada Census information (2006), nearly 1.2 million people living in Canada today report themselves to be Aboriginal (i.e., First Nations, Métis or Inuit). This represents 3.8 percent of the national population.

- Nearly two-thirds of Canada's entire Aboriginal population is First Nations peoples. In all regions except Nunavut, First Nations peoples – both status and non-status that live on and off reserves – make up the largest Aboriginal identity group.
- Just under one-third identify themselves as Métis. However, in Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba, the heart of the Métis Nation Homeland, Métis comprise more than one-third of the Aboriginal population, a larger proportion than in other provinces.
- Nearly five percent of Canada's Aboriginal population is Inuit.

The number of people in Canada who self-identify as Aboriginal is growing everywhere – in rural areas, on reserves and in cities. This growth is especially obvious in urban areas: half of Aboriginal peoples in Canada now live in urban centres (including large cities or census metropolitan areas and smaller urban centres). In some western cities, including Winnipeg, Regina, Saskatoon and Edmonton, Aboriginal people make up a substantial portion of the population. And in cities where Aboriginal populations are smaller, such as in Toronto and Montreal, their numbers have increased by 30 percent and 60 percent, respectively, between 2001 and 2006.

Urban Aboriginal peoples are an increasingly significant social, political and economic presence in Canadian cities today – and yet relatively little is known about these individuals' experiences and perspectives. The goal of the *Urban Aboriginal Peoples Study (UAPS)* is to understand better this important and growing population. The *UAPS* is different than any other survey of the Aboriginal population. The *UAPS* does not seek to collect a series of economic and social 'facts' about Aboriginal people living in the city. Rather it is an enquiry about the values, experiences, identities and aspirations of urban Aboriginal peoples. How do they see themselves in relation to their communities – both geographically and culturally? Which factors are leading them toward greater success, autonomy and cultural confidence? What are their hopes for the future, their definitions of success? What tools and supports have helped them? What barriers have impeded them?

Another goal of *UAPS* is to provide opportunities for dialogue among Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples. As asserted by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples,¹ the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in Canada has long been troubled. These problems do not inhere in either community, but in the nature of the relationships (institutional, intergroup and interpersonal) between the communities. Thus, a way forward in renewing the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people is through ‘parallel’ information on non-Aboriginal urban Canadians’ attitudes and perceptions of Aboriginal people that provides insight into their mutual relations.

The *UAPS* also encompasses a pilot study measuring the experiences and success in the lives of National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation scholars who have pursued or are pursuing post-secondary education. This aspect of the study provides important insights into this accomplished group of individuals.

To accomplish its aims, the *UAPS* included three separate research elements:

- First, 2,614 person-to-person interviews were conducted (the “Main” survey) with First Nations peoples (status and non-status), Métis and Inuit in 11 cities across Canada: Vancouver, Edmonton, Calgary, Regina, Saskatoon, Winnipeg, Thunder Bay, Montreal, Toronto, Halifax and Ottawa (Inuit only), between March and October 2009.
- Second, a telephone survey was conducted with 2,501 non-Aboriginal urban Canadians living in these same cities (excluding Ottawa) from April to May 2009.
- Finally, a survey of 182 current and past National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation (NAAF) scholars was conducted on-line from June to July 2009.

Once the *UAPS* was underway, it was recognized that there was a significant opportunity to expand upon the standard reporting for this type of project by creating a video archive of the lives of urban Aboriginal peoples, as told in their own words. The Department of Indian/Native Communication Arts at First Nations University was commissioned to conduct 50 one-hour long video interviews with survey participants in each city, with the objective of bringing the study “to life” with the faces and voices of diverse individuals involved in the *UAPS*. This video archive will be made available on the *UAPS* website www.uaps.ca.

A note on terminology

The term “urban Aboriginal peoples” is used frequently in this report. The term refers to citizens of the Inuit, Métis and First Nations Peoples currently residing in urban areas.

It is also important to emphasize that the cities included in the *UAPS* are built on or around Aboriginal nations and communities. Aboriginal populations in these places are not “new” populations; their presence has long preceded these urban centres.

¹ The Royal Commission on Aboriginal People (RCAP) was a Canadian Royal Commission established in 1991 to address many issues of Aboriginal status that had come to light with recent events such as the Oka Crisis and the Meech Lake Accord. The commission culminated in a final report of 4,000 pages and 440 recommendations published in 1996 that contains a great wealth of information, analysis and recommendations on a range of issues including treaties, economic development, health, housing, Métis perspectives and the North. To date, the federal government has not implemented the RCAP recommendations.

Organization of this report

The Urban Aboriginal Peoples Study: Main Report is organized into 12 chapters:

Chapter 1, The Research – A Tale of Eleven Cities, describes the *UAPS* research process, including the design, implementation and interpretation of the Main survey with First Nations peoples, Métis and Inuit living in Canadian cities, along with descriptions of the non-Aboriginal survey and the NAAF pilot survey.

Chapter 2 provides useful background information drawn from Statistics Canada and other relevant sources on the Aboriginal population in Canada. **The Urban Aboriginal Context** includes a description of the Aboriginal identity population (First Nations, Métis, Inuit), along with socio-demographic information on population growth rates, urbanization and socio-economic trends.

Chapter 3 delivers main findings from the *UAPS* on **Urban Aboriginal Peoples' Sense of Place**. Key topics addressed include the proportion of first, second and third plus generation urban residents among *UAPS* participants, urban Aboriginal peoples' connection to their city of residence and the degree to which it, or another place, is home for them, their satisfaction with city life, and their belief that they can make their city a better place to live.

Chapter 4 delves into the subject of **Urban Aboriginal Identity**. Key aspects of Aboriginal identity considered in this chapter include knowledge of family history, pride in Aboriginal and Canadian identities, community belonging, and the continuing role and intergenerational effects of colonial projects upon the identities of Aboriginal peoples in Canadian cities, namely Indian residential schools. How these aspects of urban Aboriginal identity vary socio-demographically is also explored.

CHAPTER 5 explores the subject of **Urban Aboriginal Culture**. Notwithstanding the challenges and difficulties Aboriginal peoples face in maintaining their cultural values and beliefs in a mainly non-Aboriginal urban setting, *UAPS* data show Aboriginal peoples living in Canadian cities are finding ways to respect and practice their cultural traditions.

CHAPTER 6 provides main findings on urban Aboriginal peoples' **Experiences With Non-Aboriginal People**. Specifically, how Aboriginal people are thought to be perceived by non-Aboriginal people, in what ways non-Aboriginal people are viewed as different from Aboriginal people, and in what ways experiences with non-Aboriginal people have shaped the lives of urban Aboriginal peoples and who they are today. This chapter also explores their experiences with non-Aboriginal services in their city.

Chapter 7 explores urban Aboriginal peoples' **Political Identity and Engagement**, namely their levels of engagement in Aboriginal *and* Canadian politics and political organizations, and what factors characterize more or less involvement in these two spheres.

Chapter 8, Justice, delves into urban Aboriginal peoples' perceptions of and experience with the justice system, in terms of their confidence in the system, their support for an alternate Aboriginal justice system, and whether or not they believe alternate approaches to justice for Aboriginal people within the current system can make a difference.

Chapter 9 encompasses all four themes of the *UAPS* (i.e., identity, experiences, aspirations and values) as it explores **Happiness, Life Aspirations and Definitions of "Success" among Urban Aboriginal Peoples**. Perceptions of their quality of employment and health are also captured in this chapter.

Chapter 10 expands upon the statistics about Aboriginal educational achievement, by exploring the impact that education has, and what can be done to ensure that those who want a post-secondary education are successful. **Educational Values, Aspirations and Experiences** addresses questions such as: What has the educational experience of urban Aboriginal peoples been like? For those who pursued a post-secondary education, who and what motivated them, and what are the benefits they have realized from that experience? What supports did they rely on during their post-secondary studies, and what supports would they have liked to have had? And finally, how much value do urban Aboriginal peoples place on education, and on the different forms that learning can take?

Chapter 11 summarizes findings from the **National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation Scholar Survey**. This pilot study aimed to identify and measure experiences and success in the lives of NAAF scholars who have pursued or are pursuing post-secondary education.

Chapter 12, the final chapter of the report, captures **Non-Aboriginal Perspectives of Aboriginal Peoples**. Topics explored include non-Aboriginal urban Canadians' perceptions of Aboriginal people in Canada, their awareness of Aboriginal peoples and communities in their cities, their contact and interaction with Aboriginal people, their perspectives on how well institutions respond to the needs of Aboriginal people, their knowledge of salient Aboriginal issues (i.e., Indian residential schools, acceptance of differential systems of justice), and the importance of Aboriginal history and culture in the minds of NA urban Canadians.

An overview at the beginning of each chapter summarizes the main *UAPS* findings and, where relevant, provides summaries of findings from the unique perspectives of First Nations peoples, Métis and Inuit.

Finally, unless otherwise noted, all of the numbers in the graphs are percentages.